

VZCZCXRO5418  
OO RUEHDBU RUEHDT  
DE RUEHKO #1886/01 0970825  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 070825Z APR 06  
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0665  
INFO RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY 0367  
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 0108  
RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY BAKU 0009  
RUEHBD/AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 0901  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1585  
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 0149  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0573  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0617  
RUEHDT/AMEMBASSY DILI  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE  
RUEHHI/AMEMBASSY HANOI 0909  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1866  
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 4092  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0329  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0539  
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR 1645  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 7937  
RUEHPF/AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH 0565  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7765  
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 6593  
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT 0172  
RUEHUM/AMEMBASSY ULAANBAATAR 0380

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 001886

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/06/2016

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SUBJECT: MOFA REORGANIZES SOUTH ASIA DEPARTMENT; SIGNALS  
STRATEGIC THINKING TOWARD INDIA, REGION

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Joe Donovan. Reasons: 1.4 b/d

11. (C) Summary. Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) is creating a South Asia Department by merging parts of the Southwest Asia, First Southeast Asia and Second Southeast Asia divisions of the Asian Affairs Bureau. The move stems from a perceived organizational need to devote more resources to India and ASEAN, MOFA sources tell us. It also signals more strategic thinking by MOFA on the region, and while not the idea of FM Aso, it fits into his forward thinking agenda on India and provides the U.S. with perhaps a more streamlined method of working trilaterally. End Summary.

12. (C) On April 6, MOFA Southwest Asia Division's Naoshige Aoshima confirmed press reports that the ministry is creating a new "South Asia Department," that will merge parts of the existing Southwest Asia, and First and Second Southeast Asia divisions of the Asian Affairs Bureau. Aoshima said the move stems from an organizational lack of resources to handle the growing -- and higher priority -- India portfolio, i.e., MOFA could not simply go out and hire more bodies, so instead it is reassigning from within. In addition to India and the South Asia region, the new department will also take on the ASEAN portfolio; Aoshima did not believe Central Asia would be included. The department head will be at the Director General level, ("shingikan" in Japanese; equivalent to Assistant Secretary) level, but on the organizational chart will still fall under the Director General for Asian Affairs. While no one has been named yet to head the new department, Aoshima speculated it would be Asian Affairs Bureau Deputy Director General Toshihisa Takata.

13. (C) On April 6, Japan Institute for International Affairs Senior Research Fellow Nobumasa Akiyama, recently returned from a non-proliferation conference in India, told Poloff he was surprised by the speed at which the new department came

into being (at least in concept), noting that Japan has been a bit slow in reacting to an India which is speeding forward.

In Akiyama's analysis, the move indicates a huge change in MOFA's perception of the region, moving away from simply the Pacific Rim countries closest geographically to Japan, to indicate more strategic thinking regarding Japan's interests/role in the broader Asian region. Akiyama suggested to Poloff Japan would like to serve as a role model for India's civilian nuclear program, but, as the only victim of a nuclear bomb, the Japanese psyche is still resistant to accepting any initiative which could damage the NPT or the non-proliferation regime in general.

¶4. (C) MOFA UN Policy Division Deputy Director Aya Yoshida, who accompanied FM Aso to New Delhi in January, told us April 6 that while she understood the idea to create the new department arose before Aso took over as FM last October, it fits well into his agenda of placing a higher priority on Japan-India relations. The success of the Aso visit, along with PM Koizumi's April 2005 trip, helped create the atmosphere and demonstrate the necessity to old-school bureaucrats resisting the change. She also said the ministry is responding to "huge pressures" from Japanese business, which has been urging MOFA to strengthen the bilateral relationship for quite some time. Finally, she said that she believed the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative was a key impetus for getting MOFA to move quickly on reorganizing the bureau.

¶5. (C) COMMENT. The new South Asia Department's creation reinforces what contacts here tell us, i.e., that Japan is hurrying to respond to India's rise and its implications for

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Japan's interests in the region, particularly vis-a-vis China. It can also be interpreted as a signal that Japan is almost ready to catch up to the pace of change taking place in the subcontinent and the greater Asia region.  
SCHIEFFER